Draft

Finding of No Significant Impact

Establishment and Operation of a Digital Multi-purpose Battle Area Course and Complementary Facilities at Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk, Louisiana

Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) and Army guidance published at 32 CFR Part 651 (*Environmental Analyses of Army Actions*), the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) and Fort Polk, Louisiana, has conducted an environmental assessment (EA) of the potential environmental and socioeconomic effects of establishment and operation of a battle area course and complementary facilities at the installation's Peason Ridge training area.

Proposed Action. The Army uses Peason Ridge, a 33,011-acre[1] noncontiguous training area approximately 15 miles north of Fort Polk's Main Post, for maneuver and live-fire training. The JRTC and Fort Polk proposes to establish and operate a Digital Multi-Purpose Battle Area Course (DMPBAC) and complementary facilities in the northeast quadrant of Peason Ridge. The DMPBAC would be a state-of-the-art range facility that would enable platoon- and company-level training in maneuver and live fire to occur simultaneously with direct and indirect, organic, and supporting fires. The complementary facilities would consist of a shoot house, breach facility, an urban assault course, and two live-fire villages. These facilities would permit practice and evaluated training in additional combat skills for soldiers negotiating the battle area course. The Army needs the proposed facilities in order to meet its nonnegotiatble contract with the American people to fight and win the Nation's wars and to fully prepare soldiers for combat. Units that would train at the new facilities at Peason Ridge principally include the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, other home-stationed units at Fort Polk, and rotational (visiting) brigades undergoing evaluated training at the JRTC.

Establishment of the DMPBAC would draw on several existing technologies to provide the most instructive multiple purpose range possible to accommodate a variety of maneuver and supporting arms combat training exercise scenarios under realistic battlefield conditions. The proposed DMPBAC would be occupied an estimated 242 days per year. Firing of 105 mm and 120 mm "heavy" weapons would occur 82 days per year. The DMPBAC would have 2 qualification firing trails, 10 vehicle battle positions, and 10 machine gun bunkers. Its battle area portion would cover approximately 700 acres. Firing points and targets would be oriented to direct rounds into the existing Peason Ridge impact area. The four facilities would enhance effectiveness of training. A central control and after-action review building, range storage/maintenance building, and miscellaneous storage buildings would support DMPBAC operations. The DMPBAC would use approximately 12 miles of existing roads. An additional 10.6 miles of new roads would be constructed to support maneuver and live fire and to allow for target maintenance. Development of vehicle maneuver routes would require construction of 14 low-water crossings. Approximately 914 acres of forest would be clear-cut, and another 2,285 acres would be thinned. An estimated 1,450,000 cubic yards of earthworks construction would be required. Forty silt

[1] Under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) dated January 6, 2003, the Army and the Forest Service have stated their desire and intent to interchange certain parcels of land. Under the terms of the MOU, the Forest Service will transfer to the Army administrative control of its 480 acres (four tracts) at Peason Ridge and the Army will transfer to the Forest Service administrative control of 480 acres (six tracts) elsewhere at the installation. As a result of the interchange, all 33,491 acres at Peason Ridge will be under Army administrative control once the MOU is implemented. A Forest Service decision on permitting tree removal and range construction prior to MOU implementation would be made based on its review of the EA.

operation begins, the JRTC and Fort Polk will prepare a Range Maintenance, Erosion Control, and Water Quality Monitoring Plan in order to sustain Peason Ridge resources. The plan will focus on monitoring the condition of resources and, through use of adaptive management techniques, provide for maintenance and restoration of any resources adversely affected by range operations.

Alternatives. In addition to the no action alternative, the Army considered four alternatives for meeting the need for training on a state-of-the-art battle area course.

1. Under the first of these alternatives, the Army could seek to fulfill its requirements by renovating, expanding, or converting existing training facilities at the JRTC and Fort Polk. By separate action, the Army has proposed to digitize and upgrade its present multi-purpose range complex in the Main Post's Mill Creek Training Area because the complex does not meet future standards with respect to vehicle dispersion and longer effective ranges associated with training of modern digitized units. Numerous proposed changes to the complex would enable the JRTC and Fort Polk, as a Combat Training Center, to provide better support to light brigades and other units participating in exercises. Scheduling priorities for the complex, however, would continue to allow use to home-stationed units only on an intermittent and "as available" basis. For these reasons, this alternative was found not reasonable and, accordingly, was not evaluated in detail in the EA.

2. Under this alternative the Army could seek to fulfill its requirements for a DMPBAC and complementary facilities through the use of off-post private sector or other Army installation facilities. Use of private sector resources, obtained through lease or purchase, would not be possible because no sources provide the types of land areas and equipment applicable to a DMPBAC and complementary facilities. Moreover, use of other Army installations' training facilities was found not feasible because no such facilities are within a reasonable distance from Fort Polk. For these reasons, this alternative was found not reasonable and, therefore, not evaluated in detail.

3. Under this alternative the Army could seek to fulfill its requirements for a DMPBAC and complementary facilities through the use of simulation training. Effective battle training requires soldiers and leaders to be exposed to the elements during day and night operations; experience sleep deprivation; employ land navigation skills; practice fieldcraft, weapon handling, and fire and maneuver tactics; engage in tactical foot marches with combat loads in a continuous exercise over natural terrain; and conduct military operations precisely on time, regardless of intervening obstacles. These types of training experiences cannot be simulated. For these reasons this alternative was found not reasonable and, therefore, not evaluated in detail.

4. Under this alternative the Army could seek to fulfill its battle area course and related facilities requirements through the siting of the DMPBAC and complementary facilities at a location other than the northeast portion of Peason Ridge. A DMPBAC requires a substantial land area to accommodate maneuvering and firing, as well as an impact area and adequate Surface Danger Zones and other buffer zones to ensure the safety and compatibility of adjacent land uses. Review of potential alternative locations for a DMPBAC showed that none are reasonably available at the JRTC and Fort Polk's Main Post or at Peason Ridge. Accordingly, alternative locations for the DMPBAC at the JRTC and Fort Polk were deemed not reasonable and, therefore, were not evaluated in detail in the EA.

Environmental Consequences. The EA identifies and evaluates the environmental resources and conditions for the no action and proposed action alternatives. The following table summarizes the conclusions contained in the EA.

Table 1 Summary of Environmental and Socioeconomic Effects	
No Action Alternative	***Proposed Action***
Land Use/Land Cover	
No new or additional effects beyond those due to the continuation of current operations.	Long-term beneficial effects on installation land use would be expected. Long-term direct minor adverse effects on land cover would be expected. Beneficial effects would arise from alleviating training intensity at other range facilities on the Main Post. Adverse effects on land cover would arise from DMPBAC construction and the increased intensity of military activities that would have physical impacts on natural resources. Localized long-term moderate adverse effects on surrounding land use would arise from noise annoyance and increased traffic.
Geology and Soils	
No new or additional effects on geologic and topographic conditions, soils, mineral development, or prime farmland would be expected.	Long-term minor localized adverse effects on topography would be expected as a result of the reshaping of land due to earthworks, borrow pits, and construction projects during construction of the DMPBAC. Short- and long-term moderate and long-term minor adverse effects on soils would occur from both DMPBAC construction and training activities. Short-term increases in runoff and erosion would occur during facility construction as a result of removal of vegetation and exposure of erodible soils. Long-term minor adverse effects would occur from clearcutting and thinning the forested land. The expected future average soil loss rate for the proposed site for the DMPBAC would be 6.34 tons per acre per year (t/ac/yr), up from the current 4.48 t/ac/yr.
Water Resources: Toxics	
No new or additional effects would be expected on water quality.	Short- and long-term direct and indirect minor adverse effects to in-stream water quality would arise from toxic chemicals. Sediments contaminated by munitions compounds, their by-products, and heavy metals could be deposited to surface waters.
Water Resources: Sedimentation/Hydrology	
No new or additional effects would be expected on water quality.	Short-term moderate adverse effects on water quality would occur from soils disturbance during construction that would increase sediment runoff during storm events, though the effects would be minimized by the construction of sediment retention structures. Short-term moderate adverse effects on water quality would occur from road construction, clearcutting and tree thinning, earthwork construction, and range maintenance activities, though the effects will be minimized by construction sequencing; having sediment basins in place before project construction, thinning, or clearcutting begins; adherence to the SWPPP; and implementation of a range management plan. Construction of stream crossings would cause localized short-term direct moderate adverse effects, and arched and low-water stream crossings would result in long-term beneficial effects through hardening and protecting the streambanks and approaches. Short-term localized moderate adverse effects would be expected due to resuspension of sediment when vehicles ford streams using hardened low-water stream crossings. Long-term minor adverse effects to water quality would occur from soil loss from increased training intensity.
Water Resources: Groundwater	
No adverse effects on groundwater quality relative to baseline conditions would be expected.	Long-term minor direct and indirect effects would arise from UXO left on ranges and training areas and the use of pyrotechnics, obscurants and fog oil. Long-term direct beneficial effects would arise from updating arms storage facilities and ammunition supply points. Short-term minor adverse effects could occur due to fuel and hazardous materials spills.

Table 1
Summary of Environmental and Socioeconomic Effects

No Action Alternative	*Proposed Action*
Biological Resources: Vegetation/Forestry	
No new or additional effects on vegetation or forestry would be expected.	Short- and long-term moderate adverse effects would occur from the permanent conversion of 914 predominately forested acres. Long- and short-term direct minor adverse impacts would arise during DMPBAC construction from vegetation clearing and loss. Long-term direct minor adverse impacts would arise from DMPBAC operation due to trampling of vegetation. No new or additional effects on forest management would be expected.
Biological Resources: Aquatic Life, Wildlife, and MIS	
No new or additional effects on wildlife, aquatic life, or MIS would be expected.	Long-term minor adverse effects on wildlife and sensitive species would be expected. Short-term moderate adverse effects on wildlife would occur during the construction phase of the project, though adverse impacts from construction would be offset by long-term benefits from creating open canopy forest and frequently disturbed, low-quality grassland. Edge habitat species would benefit. Some direct wildlife mortality during construction and training would occur. Short-term direct minor adverse effects on longleaf pine MIS would occur from the loss of forested habitat, though short-term benefits would arise from thinning.
Biological Resources: Protected, Endangered, Threatened, Sensitive, and Conservation Species (PETSC)	
No new or additional effects on PETSC species would be expected.	Long-term indirect minor benefits to the RCW would occur due to forest thinning. Long-term indirect minor benefits to the Louisiana pine snake would occur from the creation of additional open longleaf forest.
Biological Resources: Wetlands	
No new or additional effects on wetlands would be expected.	Short- and long-term localized moderate adverse effects would arise from constructing low-water stream crossings and sediment basins in riparian corridors and from range operations. An estimated 1.0 acre of wetlands could be adversely affected.
Cultural Resources	
No direct or indirect effects on cultural resources would occur.	Short-term minor adverse effects could occur if soil disturbance and excavations were to inadvertently disturb known archaeological sites or as-yet-unidentified archaeological or paleontological sites. No Native American resources, such as traditional cultural properties, or paleontological resources are known to be present in the project area.
Noise Levels	
There would be no appreciable change to the ambient noise levels at Fort Polk.	Periodic short-term moderate adverse effects on the noise level would occur during construction and operation of the DMPBAC. Long-term direct minor to moderate adverse effects would arise from off-post peak noise levels that would exceed 90 dB at times, varying with munitions and weather conditions. The frequency of noise complaints would increase. Short-term adverse minor effects would occur near the Helicopter Flight Zone and the associated flight paths.
Air Quality	
No effect on air quality would occur relative to baseline conditions.	Long-term minor adverse effects on air quality would occur from military training and operations over the next 20 years. Emissions in excess of those currently emitted would result from additional cleaning operations; aircraft flights; engine run-ups; vehicle operation; use of diesel engines, ground support equipment, and munitions and obscurants; BIDS training; equipment maintenance; and fugitive emissions resulting from military field training exercises.

Table 1
Summary of Environmental and Socioeconomic Effects

No Action Alternative	*Proposed Action*
Socioeconomic Conditions	
No new or additional effects would occur relative to baseline conditions.	Short-term direct and indirect moderate beneficial effects would arise from increasing ROI sales volume, income, and employment with the construction of the DMPBAC and associated facilities. Most economic benefits would last for only the duration of the construction period. Long-term minor beneficial effects on the local economy from timbering could occur. Localized long-term moderate adverse effects as decreased property values near the perimeter of the DMPBAC could occur from noise annoyance and increased traffic. Long-term minor direct adverse effects on public access and recreational value would arise from a decrease in recreational visitor days. No effects would be expected on environmental justice or protection of children. Effects on public health and safety could range from minor adverse, associated with increased operations training, exposure to hazardous waste or hazardous materials, and safety risks during construction; to minor beneficial, associated with increased safety training.
Transportation and Infrastructure	
No new or additional effects on transportation and infrastructure would occur relative to baseline conditions.	Long-term minor adverse effects on road conditions would result from wear and tear, though frequent road maintenance and rehabilitation would minimize the effects. Short-term minor adverse effects on traffic levels would occur during construction. Short-term direct minor adverse impacts on airspace would result from the airspace being used more often and more intensively. Long-term minor adverse effects on water supply would result during DMPBAC operation from additional personnel, though the potable water supply is sufficient to meet the demand. Long-term negligible adverse effects on sewage treatment would result, though the wastewater treatment system would be able to handle all increases in demand. Negligible long-term adverse effects on solid waste management would occur from construction and additional personnel. Long-term minor adverse effects on electricity supply would occur due to additional electrical infrastructure and personnel needed to support facilities, though the increased demand would be handled easily by the existing electrical system infrastructure.
Hazardous and Toxic Materials/Wastes	
No adverse effects from hazardous and toxic materials and wastes would be expected relative to baseline conditions.	Short- and long-term minor adverse effects associated with the storage, handling, and transport of hazardous materials and wastes at the vehicle fueling area, maintenance building, and battery storage facility would be expected. Direct minor adverse effects would arise from the temporary storage and use of various munitions and ammunition on the DMPBAC.

Table 1 Summary of Environmental and Socioeconomic Effects	
No Action Alternative	***Proposed Action***
Cumulative Effects	
No new or additional effects would be expected relative to baseline conditions.	Minor beneficial effects on land use from construction and operation. Long-term direct beneficial effects to endangered species, specifically the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker. Minor adverse effects on land cover, soils, public access, recreation, transportation and infrastructure, and hazardous and toxic materials/wastes from operation. Short-term minor adverse effects on forest vegetation and associated ecosystems, forest wildlife, wetlands, and cultural resources from construction and operation. Long-term minor adverse effects water quality, groundwater, and air quality from operation. Short-term moderate adverse effects from noise during operation. Long-term moderate adverse effects to water quality from operation.

Mitigation. Adverse effects identified throughout the EA will be addressed through adherence to best management practices and through the JRTC and Fort Polk environmental stewardship program. Specific stewardship measures or initiatives are discussed in the EA after each affected resource area or condition.

Conclusions. Based on the EA, which is attached hereto and incorporated herein, it has been determined that implementation of the proposed action would have no significant effects on the quality of the human or natural environmental. Preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required prior to implementation of the proposed action.

Copies of the EA may be obtained by writing to Mr. Dan Nance, Public Affairs Office, 7073 Radio Road, Fort Polk LA 71459-5342 or accessing the JRTC and Fort Polk web site at http://www.jrtc-polk.army.mil. Comments on the proposed action, the EA, or this draft Finding of No Significant Impact may be submitted to the JRTC and Fort Polk at the foregoing address. Subject to comments that may be received from individuals, organizations, or agencies, the JRTC and Fort Polk intends to execute the Finding of No Significant Impact 30 days after its release for public review and to proceed with the proposed action.

This draft Finding of No Significant Impact is released by:

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